

There is no single fix for the educational problems plaguing our country yet it is clear that major reforms need to take place. Potential solutions are policies that provide family support so that students grow up in places that encourage learning. Since teachers are the most important aspect of education, more resources could be put into teacher programs and salaries that incentivize job growth. Congress could also work towards bipartisan policies that ensure schools around the U.S. have equal quality and access to resources through more funding. In 2015, 55% of government funding went to the military, while only 6% went to education. An increase in education funding is a justifiable change that could dramatically help broken systems.

With a better educated workforce, people will have better jobs and rely on government less, benefiting the U.S. economy. Opportunity gaps in education would also decrease and the U.S. would become more competitive as a result. This is another incentive for making education a priority to those in Washington.

Our combined futures are dependent on the youth of today; but our nation's children are only as good as the education they are provided with. As Nelson Mandela said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." Let's take advantage of it.

MEGAN HUGHES, CANAAN MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

As many Americans know, we are very blessed to have colleges available in our country. College allows a young adult to further his or her knowledge of the world around them so they can be ready to enter the workforce. College tuition used to be affordable, so that everyone could further their education. This is important because more educated people means a stronger growing economy. At the same time, the cost of tuition rises dramatically each year, and families with more than one child find themselves in tough financial situations. Most of the time people use loans, and end up paying back student debt for years. Every American deserves to have a college education, which is why state colleges should be tuition free.

Elementary and high school is mandatory for all American citizens. Parents who refuse to send their children to school have to pay large fines or even serve jail time. If early education is this important to Americans, why is college not? Why should the emphasis just be on getting a primary or secondary education? More and more jobs today are requiring higher than just a high school diploma. In an article by Adam Davidson, he says that "Workers with more education are more productive, which makes companies more profitable and the overall economy grow faster." This is true, more educated people means more jobs are being done correctly and efficiently, and as a result boosting the economy.

In an article by Steven Goodman he said "Two-thirds of American undergraduates are in debt. This year, student loan debt will grow to more than a trillion dollars, outpacing credit card debt for the first time." This article was written in 2011, meaning only four years ago student debt was already in the trillions. When young adults leave home and enter the work force, they have to deal with adult responsibilities for the first time. On top of that, they usually need to pay off student debt. If college were to be tuition free these people would not have large debts. The money they make could go towards paying bills, and saving money for their future or retirement. It would also help attract those who were never thinking about

going to college because of the high costs. All this leads to more people buying and selling goods which is important for a country to prosper.

State colleges should be free because the economy will grow faster with more educated people, and young adults will not be paying college debt for half their life. How exactly this would be done is simple, put higher taxes on the wealthy. With the top class distributing their money towards education, everyone can have the opportunity to further their education. People can use their hard working money on other things, like purchasing a house or providing for a child. That is why it is important to have free college tuition because it creates an educated population, less debt, and saving for other necessities.

TORI JARVIS, MISSISQUOI VALLEY UNION HIGH SCHOOL (FINALIST)

Since the recent crimes committed by the terror group ISIS, hate crimes against Muslims have skyrocketed. Recently, "an Arab-American man was brutally attacked by two white men . . . (who) also taunted his daughter, who wears a hijab, making references to ISIS . . . The attackers called (them) 'r-head' and said, 'Go back to your country.'" Wrote Tom Carter for an article on the World Socialist Website. Obviously, these men attacked the man and his daughter for their race and religion, equating the fact that they were Muslim with terrorism even though there was no sensible reason to. People are so scared of terrorism that they lash out at anything they can associate with it.

People in power or who wish to be in power are using this fear to convince them that Muslims are the ones to be feared. The most recent—and most dangerous—example is Donald Trump, who wants to ban Muslims from coming into the country. This move has not only heightened the fear of ISIS, but made people believe the Muslims currently in our country are associated with terrorism, creating more violence. Encouraged by Presidential candidates like Donald Trump, some Americans blame the entire religion of Islam, and anyone who follows it, for all of our country's problems. They believe that because these terrorists are following a distorted version of the Qu'ran and the religion of Islam, that anyone else who worships the peaceful religion is a terrorist as well. Unfortunately, people don't realize that Muslims are not terrorists. Muslim athlete Muhammad Ali once said; "Terrorists are not following Islam. Killing people and blowing up people and dropping bombs in places and all this is not the way to spread the word of Islam. So people realize now that all Muslims are not terrorists." Muslims are too often oppressed, even violently attacked by Americans who blame them for terrorism. Muslims in America today are now experiencing racism the way black people used to, and are violently and verbally abused by white people who are looking for someone to blame.

Jermaine Jackson, one of Michael Jackson's siblings, has pointed out "Muslims have become the new Negroes in America. They are being mistreated at airports, by the Immigration—everywhere. Islam is a religion of peace. They are wrong." People who wear hijabs seem to have a target placed on them. Muslims are "randomly selected" for full body searches at airports, forced to prove they're in this country legally, and attacked by people who have different religious opinions. The violence against Muslims must end, whether it physical or mental. As the civil war in the Middle East is creating unlivable conditions for its inhabitants, they're counting on us to take them in and keep them safe.

America is trying to divide and conquer—focusing on conquering Muslims as a whole rather than just ISIS. Rather than attacking the Muslims in our country, we should be focusing on the actual members of ISIS, and not people who have no association with the organization.

ALEXIS MANCHESTER, GREEN MOUNTAIN TECHNOLOGY AND CAREER CENTER (FINALIST)

Today in America, people are going to prison wasting countless economic resources and potentially ruining the lives of people all because of the recreational use of marijuana.

While people often say marijuana is a gateway drug, I strongly disagree. There are more people that drink a glass of milk per day and become addicted to more serious drugs, than those who use marijuana. It is not uncommon to hear echoes of this sentiment in other contexts as well, particularly, the media and Presidential candidates. In fact, Senator Sanders himself suggests that marijuana should be legalized: "I suspect I would vote yes. And I would vote yes because I am seeing in this country too many lives being destroyed for non-violent offenses. We have a criminal justice system that lets CEOs on Wall Street walk away, and yet we are imprisoning or giving jail sentences to young people who are smoking marijuana. I think we have to think through this war on drugs which has done an enormous amount of damage." I strongly agree with this statement because there is not one reported death from an overdose of marijuana. In fact, 88,000 people have died from alcohol use. I personally have never heard of somebody murdering someone because they were under the influence of marijuana. Alcohol on the other hand, has been proven to impact our culture negatively.

Facts don't lie. 58% of Americans think marijuana should be legalized, including me. Around 40% of Americans admit to already using marijuana. If marijuana was legalized, we could tax it and allow citizens who choose to use it to benefit our communities in more effective ways than keeping it illegal. Marijuana is a safer drug than others and there is a very low risk of abuse. Marijuana can be safe and useful for instance. Legalizing marijuana will bring the nation's largest cash crop under the rule of law, creating jobs, and economic opportunities in the formal economy instead of the illicit market. Washington, Alaska, Oregon and Colorado haven't had any major issues with their legalization. Washington State raked in more than \$70 million in taxes its first year of legal regulated marijuana sales. In Colorado the total of marijuana tax and license cash funds is the total of \$11,290,012 annually. Alaska stands to make between \$5.1 million and \$19.2 million in tax revenue from commercial marijuana in 2016, according to the preliminary estimate by the Alaska Department of Revenue. Oregon's first week of recreational use of marijuana sales top \$11 million dollars. Clearly, the taxes incurred would positively benefit our state and country should we choose to jump on board.

In closing, I hope you can appreciate my ideas, although I am just one voice. America is a progressive kind of people and we must do what we can to continue to demonstrate the values that make us great. Thank you for your time.●

RECOGNIZING THE LOUISIANA MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION

● Mr. VITTER. Mr. President, today my colleague Senator BILL CASSIDY and I are honored to have the opportunity to acknowledge and express gratitude to the Louisiana Municipal

Association, LMA, in recognition of their 90th anniversary.

Founded in 1926, the Louisiana Conference of Mayors was created with the purpose of providing a forum for mutual consultation and discussion of various topics affecting municipal government. The organization also aided the growth and development of each municipality through education about best practices and problem solving. Shortly after the Louisiana Conference of Mayors was created, the Great Depression swept the Nation. In 1937, a handful of resilient mayors met to revive the organization, giving it new life as the Louisiana Municipal Association. They may not have foreseen that their tenacity in overcoming adversity during the Great Depression and taking proactive steps to keep Louisiana municipalities united and strong would form the basis for the core values to which the LMA still adheres today.

From its inception, the LMA has focused on helping local elected leaders create and maintain efficient and effective municipal governments. In 1987, the nonprofit, nonpartisan LMA created Risk Management, Inc., RMI, to address the insurance and liability demands of member municipalities through its inter-local risk pool. In 1999, the Louisiana Municipal Advisory and Technical Services Bureau, Inc., LaMATS, was created with the purpose of providing essential services to assist municipalities in their day-to-day operations.

In addition to these wholly owned subsidiaries, the LMA has three political subdivisions—Louisiana Municipal Gas Authority, Unemployment Compensation Fund, and Louisiana Community Development Authority; four advisory organizations—Louisiana Association of Chiefs of Police, Louisiana Rural Water Association, Louisiana Conference of Mayors, and Louisiana Municipal Black Caucus Association; and nine affiliate organizations—Municipal Employees Retirement System, Louisiana City Attorneys Association, Louisiana Association of Municipal Secretaries and Assistants, Louisiana Recreation and Parks Association, Louisiana Association of Tax Administrators, Louisiana Municipal Clerks Association, Building Officials Association of Louisiana, Louisiana Airport Managers and Associates, and Louisiana Fire Chiefs Association.

To fulfill its mission of educating its membership and providing a forum for discussion about common issues, solutions, and problem solving, the LMA holds an annual convention, a mid-winter conference, 10 district meetings, a municipal day during the State's legislative session, and 15 or more webinars.

For decades, the LMA has had tremendous legislative success on both State and Federal levels. In the Louisiana Legislature, the LMA has been a strong voice for Louisiana municipalities in efforts to fight blight, promote law enforcement, maintain funding,

and enhance economic growth. On the Federal level, the LMA joined forces with the National League of Cities and other coastal State municipal leagues to lead the charge in lobbying Congress to enact the Homeowners Flood Insurance Affordability Act of 2014, which enacted critical reforms to the Biggert Waters Act of 2012, thereby facilitating affordable homeowner flood insurance in Louisiana and across the country.

For 90 years, the LMA has worked to strengthen the backbone of Louisiana through support and empowerment of municipal government. The organization has launched a yearlong celebration of this anniversary by naming 2016 the Year of Education. Opening festivities for this theme will commence at the midwinter conference in February under the auspices of the 2016 LMA Executive Board officers—President Mayor Carroll Breau of Springhill, First Vice President Mayor Barney Arceneaux of Gonzales, Second Vice President Mayor Lawrence Henagan of DeQuincy, Immediate Past President Mayor David Camardelle of Grand Isle, and District A Vice President Mayor Jimmy Williams of Sibley. The executive director is Ronnie Harris, former 28-year mayor of Gretna.

What started out as a collection of 29 forward-thinking mayors seeking to empower their communities has evolved into a praiseworthy organization that has earned the esteem and trust of local, State, and Federal elected officials, as well as fellow municipal leagues.

We would like to congratulate the LMA on its 90th anniversary and wish them many more years of strength and excellence.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Mr. Pate, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The messages received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

EXECUTIVE AND OTHER COMMUNICATIONS

The following communications were laid before the Senate, together with accompanying papers, reports, and documents, and were referred as indicated:

EC-4228. A communication from the Acting Secretary of the Army, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report on gifts made for the benefit of military musical units; to the Committee on Armed Services.

EC-4229. A communication from the Assistant Director for Regulatory Affairs, Office of

Foreign Assets Control, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Iranian Transactions and Sanctions Regulations" (31 CFR Part 560) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 21, 2016; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4230. A communication from the Secretary of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the Department of Commerce's 2016 Report on Foreign Policy-Based Export Controls; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4231. A communication from the Associate General Counsel for Legislation and Regulations, Office of the Deputy Secretary, Department of Housing and Urban Development, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Federal Housing Administration (FHA): Removal of 24 CFR 280—Nehemiah Housing Opportunity Grants Program" (RIN2502-AJ31) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 21, 2016; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4232. A communication from the Secretary of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, a six-month periodic report on the national emergency with respect to transnational criminal organizations that was declared in Executive Order 13581 of July 24, 2011; to the Committee on Banking, Housing, and Urban Affairs.

EC-4233. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Revenue Procedure 2016-4" (Rev. Proc. 2016-4) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 20, 2016; to the Committee on Finance.

EC-4234. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Revenue Procedure 2016-6" (Rev. Proc. 2016-6) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 20, 2016; to the Committee on Finance.

EC-4235. A communication from the Chief of the Publications and Regulations Branch, Internal Revenue Service, Department of the Treasury, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Revenue Procedure 2016-8" (Rev. Proc. 2016-8) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 20, 2016; to the Committee on Finance.

EC-4236. A communication from the Secretary of the Federal Trade Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the use of the exemption from the antitrust laws provided by the Pandemic and All-Hazards Preparedness Act; to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.

EC-4237. A communication from the Chair, U.S. Sentencing Commission, transmitting, pursuant to law, the amendments to the federal sentencing guidelines that were proposed by the Commission during the 2015–2016 amendment cycle; to the Committee on the Judiciary.

EC-4238. A communication from the Acting Director, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, Department of Commerce, transmitting, pursuant to law, the report of a rule entitled "Pacific Island Pelagic Fisheries; 2015 CNMI Longline Bigeye Tuna Fishery; Closure" (RIN0648-XE329) received in the Office of the President of the Senate on January 20, 2016; to the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation.

EC-4239. A communication from the Administrator, Transportation Security Administration, Department of Homeland Security, transmitting, pursuant to law, a report relative to the Administration's decision to enter into a contract with a private